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INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Written statement*/ submitted by the Federation of Cuban Women,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 January 2001]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English, French and Spanish from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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In Cuba, the radical transformations in the condition of women and their rights are closely linked to the development of a new social project that began in 1959 with the triumph of the Revolution. Since then, a new renovated thought about women and about their insertion in the economic, political and social life of the country is portrayed and consolidates not only at Government level but in the society at large. This ideology is translated in a political will that takes form in concrete actions which favor women, in spite of the existing privations and scarcity of financial and material resources, in a context of a country submitted by the United States to a harsh and unjustified economic, commercial and financial blockade, which not only violates international law, but constitutes the greatest violation of the human rights of the people in general and of women in particular.

Another feature which distinguishes the work done in the sphere of women's human rights is the conjugation of the need to give them participation, with the principle of working for social justice, since women were perceived as a sector of the population that needed to be redeemed because they were victims of discrimination. It was not a matter of mobilizing them with a sense of usefulness, as an alternative human resource, but it had to do with taking them into account in response to their immediate and specific interests.

The work that is being carried out in the area of women's human rights, not free from difficulties and contradictions, is besides based in the conviction that not only with the taking over of political power, nor with socio-economic development you can obtain the full integration and social equality of women. It also needs a sustained and arduous parallel work in the educational, cultural, political and ideological arena in order to slowly do away with ideological, cultural and psychological barriers and stereotypes which do not only exist in the society, but also in the family where the reconceptualization of roles is also necessary. This is a struggle where women play a protagonist role but which encompasses and should involve the entire society.

The Federation of Cuban Women was founded in 1960 as a reflection of the interest of the women to have their own space through which they could channel their own demands and concerns and their disposition to participate in the radical changes that were taking place in the country. During the years, it became a mass organization which is comprised of women of all the sectors of the society, from whatever race or creed, and jointly work for the defense of women's human rights and in the development of the socialist project which they perceive as a strategic objective.

The Federation of Cuban Women view as a great attainment the consensus reached in the Declaration and Program of Action of Vienna adopted in the II UN World Conference on Human Rights, which was a historical turning point on the issue of women's human rights and fully identifies with the acknowledgement of the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated character of the social, cultural, civil and political rights, including the right to development.

It acts nationally as the national mechanism for the advancement of women of compulsory reference for the Government, when it is going to design policies and programs for women, and in the formulation of legislative proposals which protect their rights. In this sense, it takes actions and, as an example, the National Seminar Cuban Women from Beijing to the Year 2000, that took place in Havana in 1996, should be highlighted. It was sponsored by the organization and the Government to undergo an analysis and evaluation of the agreements adopted in the IV World Conference of Women with the objective of implementing them, according to the Cuban reality.

The debates of the seminar were centered on the fundamental human rights of the Cuban women and it had a wide participation of specialists, experts, ministers, vice-ministers, women leaders and representatives of Cuban NGOs which enabled the socialization of problems and recommendations to empower, even more, the advancement of women. The following reflections where made on : How much has been attained ? What is lacking ? What strategy should be outlined for the betterment of the governmental policy on women ?

Out of this experience recommendations emerged which were taken into consideration as a base for what would later become the National Plan of Action of the Republic of Cuba to Follow-up Beijing, which came into force as a law, the 5th of May of 1997.

Later on, in 1999 the Federation of Cuban Women and the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers convened again a National Seminar of Evaluation of the National Plan of Action, in which its fulfillment was analyzed and where the responsables of each attainment or difficulty, in the concrete development of women, where identified. New recommendations were dictaminated for the nimblying of the implementation of the Plan.

The women of Cuba have the privilege of living in a country whose Government was the first to sign the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the second to ratify it. A country which periodically fulfills this international obligation giving its pertinent reports with detailed information of the achievements and obstacles which still remain to eradicate. This does not only speak of the political will of changing the state of things, but it also enhances the country when the Committee of Experts itself in their final observations to the Government in the IV Report presented in June 2000, acknowledges the work carried out in Cuba for the attainment of equality between the sexes in spite of being a country pressured under the economic blockade " which has serious repercussions in the situation of women and children and has led to the deterioration of the quality of life of the people"...

These actions are coherent with the plans, programs and national measures oriented towards the advancement of women as part of a project of social equity. Hence, the Cuban policy of promotion of this sector of the population is not the result of events and campaigns that come from abroad, but stemming from its own dynamic, it links with the aspirations that the women's and feminist movement embrace at international level.